

Sample District Audit Executive Summary

Jefferson County School District

(The Jefferson County Public School District is Kentucky's largest, and the 29th largest school district in America, serving more than 97,000 students in Preschool through Grade 12 at 152 school sites. The district's last combined Accountability Index was 70.5)

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Background and Introduction

The Kentucky Department of Education conducted an audit of Jefferson County School District during the period of 1/23/05-1/28/05. Two schools, Southern Leadership Academy Middle School and Thomas Jefferson Middle School, triggered the district audit due to the fact that they remained in a Level 3 Classification for two consecutive biennia. For this reason, the district audit was conducted by the Kentucky Department of Education. Each of Jefferson County's Level 3 schools received a scholastic audit prior to the district audit, and each of their reports was among the many documents included in the district's portfolio reviewed by the team. Additionally, a copy of the scholastic audit reports from all schools in Jefferson County that were classified as Level 3 since 2000, were included in the district portfolio for the team's review. These documents formed the basis for the district audit.

The purpose of the district audit is to assess the level of support that the district is providing (or not providing) to its schools, and particularly the level of support it provides to its lowest performing schools. The emphasis is on "support" and whether or not the level of support offered and provided meets the needs of its schools and children.

The end result is an implemented and regularly evaluated district improvement plan that will meet the needs of all its schools and students.

As required in 703KAR 5:130, Section 5 (2), the District should develop a specific support plan that is to be incorporated in this overall district improvement plan to assist and support each Level 3 School in improving its academic achievement. The attached comprehensive report provides findings and recommendations in nine standards and 55 indicators. While the language is sometimes technical in nature, it is critical to read the

contents thoroughly to grasp the true essence of what needs to happen in the Jefferson County Public Schools to better support and educate all of its children.

Toward that end, the following next steps are offered to the staff and community of the Jefferson County Public Schools. These next steps provide both short-and long-term priorities for the Jefferson County Public Schools to consider as they craft the specific support plans for all assistance schools and work to incorporate those into one district improvement plan.

These next steps were derived from the many recommendations found in the body of the district audit report:

- To ensure that low performing schools are staffed with fully certified and highly qualified teachers in all content areas and grade levels, the district should expand and improve its teacher placement and retention process for low performing schools.
- A safe and secure environment is essential for an effective learning community. Policies and procedures related to visitors entering all buildings should be enforced immediately.
- In order to meet the cultural, socio-economic and intellectual needs of all students, specific achievement gap strategies and activities should be identified for subpopulations, especially exceptional children and African-American male students. The district should put in place a process to conduct cultural audits in Level 3 schools.
- To ensure that all school councils are fully functioning, district level staff members should be assigned to regularly attend school council meetings on a rotating, quarterly basis.
- To maintain a focus on individual professional growth, district leadership should fully implement evaluation policies and procedures to ensure that individual growth plans and evaluations are completed according to state regulations and board policy.
- Checks for evidence and impact of the comprehensive district and school improvement plan implementation are necessary for improved student learning. The school board should consider a policy addressing quarterly implementation and impact checks with specific timelines to ensure monitoring and revision of the comprehensive district and school improvement plans.

As the district begins to use the results from this report to plan for improving student performance, please consider the following questions to guide your decision making process in terms of assigning priorities for school and district improvement in Jefferson County.

1. Are the right decisions being made for all children, including staff assignments, student placement and curriculum design and delivery?
2. With all the resources and support services available to all schools, why are some schools successful while others need assistance, particularly at the middle school level?
3. Why are gaps between schools (P-12) so varied?
4. Why are there diverse subgroup gaps between and within schools?

To ensure that the implications of this report and our recommendations are understood and implemented, the following additional actions should be taken:

- Disseminate the findings and recommendations of this report broadly to constituents and facilitate the questions above to arrive at root causes to aid in determining priorities for planning. Use the report for learning, reflection and action.
- Consider the implications of the report for each school's work and policies.
- Build greater understanding of new approaches to professional development and address the ways that stakeholders will have to work differently to improve instruction.
- Identify the implications of this report for stakeholders, such as principals, board members, school council members, colleges of education, and state policymakers.
- Acknowledge and address the fact that current practice does not provide adequate opportunity for teachers and principals to carry out the new demands of their work to analyze data and diagnose student needs, to determine the efficacy of their own practice, to align their instruction to new curriculum standards, and to collaborate regularly with peers.
- Locally, synthesize existing research on district-wide reform to make such information accessible to practitioners and policymakers.
- Call for high quality research from the KDE to help answer important questions like those posed above as you continually strive toward district wide success.

The district scholastic audit team, led by Larry Allen, retired Superintendent, wishes to thank the Jefferson County district staff, school board members and community for their cooperation in this week-long study of school and district performance.